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WINTER HOURS from 7:00 am to 4:30 pm
Monday through Friday.
Closed Weekends.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 12 - 13

Landscape Industry Show 2003
sponsored by the California Landscape Contractors Assoc..
Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach, CA
Info: Contact CLCA HQ at 916-830-3730 or visit www.clca.org

March 13 - 14

2003 Conference and Trade Show sponsored by the Texas
Chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects.
Inter-Continental Houston Hotel, Houston, TX
Info: Paul Weathers at 713-871-1414 or visit www.texasasla.org

March 14 - 16

Annual Plant Sale conducted by the Desert Botanical
Garden., Phoenix, AZ
Info: Call 480-941-1225 or visit www.dbg.org

March 14 - 16

Annual Plant Sale conducted by the Tucson Botanical
Garden. Tucson, AZ
March 14 for members only.
Information: Call 520-326-9686 or visit
www.tucsonbotanical.com

March 14 - 30

Annual Spring Landscaping Festival & Plant Sale
sponsored by the Boyce Thompson
Arboretum, 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. daily.
Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Superior, AZ
Information: Contact 520-689-2723 or visit
<http://ag.arizona.edu/bta/>

March 22

Spring In The Desert, Plant Sale and Educational Event
sponsored by the Community College of Southern Nevada
Ornamental Horticulture Program.
Desert Garden Center Plant Nursery, 6221 West
Charleston Blvd. Las Vegas, NV
Info: Contact Kevin Potts at kevin_potts@ccsn.nevada.edu

April 25-27

2003 FloraFEST Annual Plant Sale sponsored by the
University of Texas at El Paso
Centennial Museum and Chihuahuan Desert Gardens.
University of Texas, El Paso, TX
Information: Call 915-747-5565 or visit
<http://nasa.utep.edu/chih/chihdes.htm>

March/April

THE PERFECT FLOWER

True gardeners recognize this plant for what it is: a tough, down-to-earth plant, with no frills or special requirements that produces a blaze of color. Penstemons are true gems in the flower world, blooming contentedly each season while asking for little in return. What more could a gardener ask for? Ask any Penstemaniac!

Yes that's right, Penstemania is becoming more common worldwide. They even have a web site. People are wild about these sturdy plants that seem to thrive on neglect. In fact, the Mountain States logo is based on penstemons!

Penstemons are primarily native to North America and are found naturally in every state of the union except Vermont and Hawaii. It is said to be the largest genus of flowering plants in North America containing up to 300 species, depending on the authority you cite. There are so many different types of penstemons that you would be hard pressed to categorize them all. From alpine to hot desert conditions, small herb-like perennials to shrubs, and dozens of colors to choose from, penstemons offer a myriad of possibilities.

A member of the Scrophulariaceae or figwort family, they are related to snapdragons, as well as our own desert monkey-flower and Indian paint-brush. The name Penstemon is derived from the Greek name, pente for five and stemon, for stamen. Penstemons actually have 4 fertile stamens (the male organ of the flower) and a fifth filament-like sterile stamen known as a staminode. They are commonly referred to as Beardtongues in reference to the hairy surface on the lower half of the corolla and the staminode.

Most penstemons grow as dense rosettes of linear leaves that hug the ground. As the plant matures, several spikes emerge from the rosette bearing tubular,

funnel shaped flowers. The flowers develop from the base of the spike upwards to the tip. This provides a very long lasting display in the garden. Flower color varies widely from pale pastel pink to vivid reds and purples each bringing a different hue to the landscape.

Penstemons are absolute magnets for hummingbirds, butterflies and bees. Be prepared to see lots of activity around flowering time as these bearded beauties contain lots of nectar to sustain our winged friends.

Penstemons are easy to grow provided you are a neglectful gardener that forgets to water for long periods. In fact, it is said that the easiest way to kill a penstemon is to provide too much water. The best care for this plant is to simply leave it alone. They will thrive provided that drainage is good, they are given ample room and light is adequate.

In the low desert, a bit of afternoon shade is always appreciated even for beardtongues. Under the canopy of a deciduous tree such as mesquites and palo verdes is perfect. Too much shade can create floppy flower spikes and create the potential for root rot if the plants are overwatered as well. Remember they don't like "wet feet". For this reason, the use of organic matter in the soil is not recommended.

Penstemons have few other worries. An occasional problem with aphids can easily be remedied with insecticidal soaps. Young plants may fall victim to snails and slugs, so if you know you have these pests, provide protection or treat accordingly. Diseases such as rust, powdery mildew and leaf spot are usually prevented by the correct placement.

Some landscapers may complain that Penstemons are often short-lived perennials. Most will outlive any given annual, and with proper care (meaning frugal irrigation) they should provide several years of benefit.



If the original plants start to decline, just remember that beardtongues are heavy seed producers. New seedlings tend to come up throughout the landscape multiplying the population. In fact you may have to thin the numbers if you get a flourish of seedlings. Don't allow them to become crowded, as beardtongues prefer to have some room.

Lets take a look at what Mother Nature has in way of the Perfect Flower.

***Penstemon ambiguous* or Sand Penstemon**

This shrubby plant branches freely to form a semi-woody mound to about 3 feet tall and as wide but often smaller depending on rainfall. The leaves are linear and grass-like to 1 inch long. Smallish one inch wide white flowers with a pinkish cast adorn the plant from May through September. Native to elevations of 4,500 to 6,000 feet this penstemon is perfect for middle desert regions. It requires good drainage and frugal irrigation. It is hardy to -20°F and semi-evergreen to 15°F.

***Penstemon baccharifolius* or Rock Penstemon**

A shrubby plant comprised of a cluster of green foliage to about 2 feet tall and wide. Short spikes of rose-red flowers are produced on branch tips in the spring and summer. Our own Del Rio TM is a selection noted for its intense flower color. The attractive foliage is a rich green and the leaves bear small but soft teeth along the margin. This plant requires excellent drainage to survive. It will accept and prefers partial shade during hot summer months. It is hardy 5°F.

***Penstemon barbatus* or Scarlet Bugler**

This Penstemon is a summer bloomer from June to October with scarlet-red tubular flowers. Plants have gray-green foliage to 5 inches long on bushes 3 to 4 feet tall. Found at elevations from 4,000 to 10,000 feet this plant is hardy to -30°F. It will accept partial shade during hot summers.

***Penstemon eatoni* or Firecracker Penstemon**

This beardtongue has bright scarlet red tubular flowers borne on 2 foot tall stalks from March through June. The dark green leaves are 2 – 4 inches long forming a ground hugging rosette. Common at elevations from 2,000 to 7,000 feet this species is hardy to -10°F.

***Penstemon fendleri* or Fendler Penstemon**

Here is a southwestern native that has violet-blue flowers from April to August. The blossoms are produced on 1 to 2 foot tall spikes rising above gray-green leaves. This is another beardtongue that prefers sandy, well drained soils. Hardy to 0°F.

***Penstemon grandiflorus* or Large Flowered Beardtongue**

This Penstemon typically produces a stalk 2 to 4 feet tall bearing large lavender tubular flowers from May through June. The waxy leaves clasp the stem. Prefers dry, well drained sites with some protection from afternoon sun. Native to much of the grasslands of the Midwest this tough perennial is hardy to -30°F.



***Penstemon palmeri* or Scented Penstemon**

A Penstemon found from eastern California to New Mexico in gravelly washes at elevations from 4,000 to 6,000 feet. This is one of the few fragrant species in cultivation. Spikes to 4 feet tall bear pale pink tubular flowers containing purple stripes within from March to September. The leaves are gray-green, waxy with a toothed margin. Hardy to -10°F.

***Penstemon parryi* or Parry’s Penstemon**

One of the most commonly cultivated penstemons, the Parry’s is native to southern Arizona and into Sonora. The hot pink flowers are carried on 3 foot tall stems above a basal rosette of bluish-green leaves. It may be found blooming from February to April. Found at much lower elevations, this plant may be more suitable for warmer low desert elevations than other species. Hardy to 15°F.

***Penstemon pinifolius* or Pineleaf Penstemon**

This herbaceous perennial is native to southwestern Arizona, southwest New Mexico and into Mexico. It bears pinkish-orange flowers from June through

September on plants growing to 1 to 2 feet tall and equally as wide. From the name you would gather that this plant has short needle-like foliage resembling that of a pine. This Penstemon also demands excellent drainage. Hardy to -20°F.

***Penstemon psuedospectabilis* or Canyon Penstemon**

This beauty produces rose-purple flowers on 3 foot tall spikes from March to May. The interesting leaves are toothed and tightly wrap around the stem with bases in a clasping manner making this species very easy to identify. Found across the southwest at elevations of 2,000 to 6,000feet it is hardy to -20°F.

***Penstemon strictus* or Rocky Mountain Penstemon**

Common in the grasslands of Colorado and Wyoming at elevations of 7,000 to 8,000 this species is best suited only for higher elevation landscapes. The violet-blue flowers are produced on 2 foot tall spikes above dark green foliage. Very hardy at -30°F.

***Penstemon superbus* or Superb Penstemon**

Also known as the Coral Penstemon for its vivid coral flowers produced on 6 foot tall spikes from April to May. The foliage is blue-green to about 4 inches long. Found at elevation of 3,500 to 5,500 feet in the Chihuahuan Desert this beauty is hardy to 5°F.

***Penstemon triflorus* or Hill Country Penstemon**

A Texas native, this early bloomer typically starts the floral parade in early February and continues through April. Large deep rose-red flowers are formed on 2 foot tall flower spikes. Forms a compact bushy plant. Hardy to 0°F.

***Penstemon wrightii* or Texas Rose**

Very similar in appearance to the Coral Penstemon, this plant is more compact with spikes reaching only 4 feet tall. The coral flowers are very attractive. Hardy to 15°F.



To see great photos of these plants and more, check out our website at:

WWW.JMSWL.COM